

Security Contractors in Iraq are not above the law

Written by Mike Honda
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A [recent Congressional report](#) (pdf) found that private security contractors employed by Blackwater USA have been involved in over 160 incidents in Iraq in which their forces fired the first shot. The report also detailed “a drunken Blackwater contractor [who] shot the guard of the Iraqi Vice President”.

Most recently, reports surfaced alleging that security contractors from Blackwater [fired without provocation](#) into cars killing 11 and injuring 12 last month.

These incidents need to be investigated so that the truth can be uncovered, especially in light of the report’s revelation that U.S. military commanders have complained that “Blackwater guards ‘have very quick trigger fingers’, ‘shoot first and ask questions later,’ and ‘act like cowboys.’” The report continues that “a senior U.S. military official has asserted that the impact of Blackwater’s actions on Iraqi attitudes toward U.S. forces ‘is going to hurt us badly’ and ‘may be worse than Abu Graib.’”

These kinds of incidents are unacceptable, and the lives of our troops in Iraq must not become even more threatened because of the actions of security contractors who do not adhere to the strict code of honor subscribed to by our troops.

To address these concerns, the House passed the [Holding Security Contractors in War Zones Overseas Accountable \(MEJA Expansion and Enforcement\) Act](#). This bill, which I voted for, is designed to ensure that all private security contractors in war zones overseas will be held accountable for any criminal behavior.

Currently, U.S. courts only have jurisdiction over those contractors who are on contract with the Department of Defense. Security contractors with the State Department are not covered under U.S. law. In 2000, Congress gave U.S. courts [jurisdiction over contractors](#) in war zones overseas – but only if they are on contract with the Department of Defense.

This has left a large loophole, with contractors working in war zones overseas for the State Department or other agencies apparently not subject to U.S. court jurisdiction – meaning there

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has been no clear way to hold them accountable.

This loophole had enormous implications. There are currently more than 1,000 private security contractors working for the State Department in Iraq, including 861 Blackwater employees, potentially none of whom are presently legally accountable for any wrongdoing.

This bill will close the loophole – ensuring that all security contractors in war zones overseas will be held accountable for any criminal behavior.